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United States Department of Agriculture

Soil Conservation Service

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'Corto' Australian saltbush

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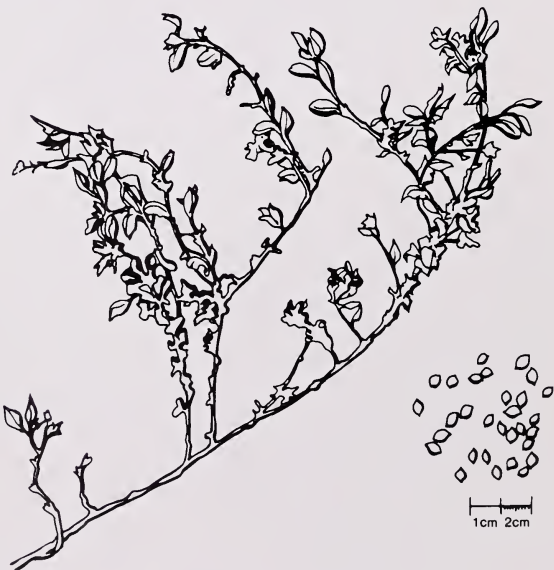


'Corto' Australian saltbush [*Atriplex semibaccata*] is a low-growing, semiprostrate, perennial plant. It is recommended for use as a ground cover or erosion control, and beautification along highways, construction sites, and other disturbed areas. In addition, it is suited for landscaping around home sites and buildings. It is also a low-volume fuel plant, useful in firebreaks.

Australian saltbush was introduced into California from Australia in 1877 and grown as a forage plant on highly alkaline soils. Seed were collected from a naturalized stand near Safford, Arizona, in 1967 and released as Corto in 1977 by the Soil Conservation Service and the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station.

Description

Corto grows 8 to 10 inches tall and is semiprostrate. Leaves are numerous, gray-green, oblong, with smooth or slightly toothed edges. Flowers are inconspicuous; fruiting bracts are fleshy and reddish when mature. Seed mature October through December.



Leaf and seed structure of Corto Australian saltbush.

Adaptation

Corto grows best on light- and medium-textured soils. It is drought and alkali tolerant. Corto is best adapted to elevations below 3,500 feet where annual rainfall is 10 to 12 inches. It should not be planted where temperatures drop below 15°F.

Establishment

Corto can be drill seeded at 3.5 pounds of pure live seed (pls) ¹ per acre, or potted plants can be transplanted 1 foot apart. Direct seeding should be done in fall or winter. Transplanting can be done at any time, if the plants are watered sufficiently. Since Corto can be damaged by trampling, it should be protected from foot traffic.

Seed production of Corto at the Tucson Plant Materials Center has averaged 450 pounds per acre with combine harvesting. Corto should be treated as an annual for certified seed production because of volunteer seedlings following the first harvest.

¹ *pls (pure live seed) = percent germination × percent purity of seed lot. To obtain actual seeding rate, divide recommended seeding rate by pls. Example: 3.5 lb/acre, 50% germination × 85% purity = 42%. 3.5 lb ÷ 0.42 = 8.3 lb*



Bank stabilization in an urban area using Corto Australian saltbush.

Availability

Corto seed are available through commercial seed companies and potted plants can purchased at many nurseries. SCS maintains breeder seed at the Tucson Plant Materials Center in Tucson, Arizona.

For more information on where you can buy Corto and how to use it and plant it, contact your local SCS office listed in the telephone directory under U.S. Government, Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service.

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